



## **Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren November 16, 2021 Meeting Summary**

On November 16, 2021, the Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (SGRG) convened for the fourth time to announce the release of its initial report to Congress. Following is a summary of key elements of the meeting.

### **Call to Order and Welcome Remarks**

The meeting was called to order by Alison Barkoff, Principal Deputy Administrator at the Administration for Community Living (ACL). Administrator Barkoff welcomed members and other participants. She expressed gratitude to members and thanked them for their hard work and commitment over the past two years in achieving an impressive accomplishment such as completing a report to Congress during a pandemic, and at a time when the issue of supporting caregivers is front and center across America. She reminded participants about the 53 million family caregivers in America and the approximately 2.7 million children that are being raised in grandparent-led families. She highlighted some of the well-documented challenges kinship and grandfamily caregivers face on a daily basis pointing out how this report has elevated the needs of caregivers to the forefront of public policy. She reminded participants that completion of the report is quite significant for more than one reason because in her words, it is going to be very useful when members of this Council join their colleagues on the RAISE Family Caregiving Advisory Council in the coming year to develop a long awaited National Family Caregiving Strategy. Upon completion, the Strategy will lay out concrete actions that can be taken by federal and state governments, communities, and by the private sector to recognize and support family caregivers across all types of situations.

Administrator Barkoff explained how increased funding and policy priorities included in the President's Build Back Better Plan will impact the lives of many kinship and grandfamily caregivers. According to her, the Council's work is not only giving a voice to kinship and grandfamily caregivers but it is also amplifying the Biden-Harris Administration's priority of strengthening the caregiving infrastructure. She spoke about the new ACL funded National Technical Assistance Center on kinship and grandfamilies, and its partner organizations which will establish the first ever National Resource Center whose primary goal will be to improve the nation's understanding and support for kinship and grandfamilies.

### **Overview of Report**

The Council's attention shifted to a presentation of the report overview by the Council's Co-Chairs: Jaia Peterson Lent, MSW, LMSW, and Ethlyn McQueen-Gibson, DNP, MSN, RN-BC. Their presentation focused on the following key issues the Council addressed in the report:

- More than 2.7 million children in the US are being raised by grandparents or other relatives.
- The children often come into the lives of caregivers without notice and no time for any type of planning.

- These unexpected moves result in significant negative impacts in the lives, finances, and other income supports of these caregivers.
- They make the needs of the children in their care a priority while neglecting their own health, mental health, physical, and emotional well-being.
- It is critical that caregivers and the children they care for are provided with the support they desperately need.
- Family is the most important influence in a child's life.
- It is well documented that some of these children come into these families after having experienced trauma, abuse, or neglect.
- Studies have shown that the love and care that these grandparent or other kin caregivers provide have a protective effect and go a long way to mitigate the impact of the stress that children have of their childhood experiences.
- When outcomes are compared for children in foster care with non-relatives to those with relatives, studies show that those in relative care have better mental health and behavioral health outcomes.
- They have more stability and are more likely to stay connected to their siblings, to their cultural identity and perhaps most compelling, they are more likely to report that they always feel loved.
- The report is a living document of voices from kin and grandparents in the community as well as those of caregivers in Indian country telling stories of their lived experiences.
- The report includes a detailed discussion of the five major priority goals the Council identified for supporting Kinship Families and Grandfamilies.
- The report provides an inventory of recommendations that will become part of a National Strategy of concrete actions that can be taken at the federal and state levels, community stakeholders, and the private sector to adequately address the impact of caregiving on kin and grandfamilies.

Members also participated in a Q&A session during which they shared personal thoughts about the report that has just been released. Some of the members who are also caregivers themselves reflected on what it meant to them individually to have served on the Council, and the incredible sense of validation they feel for finally getting recognized for their many years of sacrifice that have for so long gone unnoticed and unappreciated. They also discussed ways to collaborate in the next task of developing a National Family Caregiving Strategy.

Members also listened to two speakers from Generations United: Donna Butts, Executive Director, and Ana Beltran, Director of the new National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC) regarding the recently awarded grant for a five year project by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) to develop a National Technical Assistance Center on Grandfamilies and Kinship Families. Below are some of the highlights of their presentation:

- Generations United foresaw the need to have a place like NTAC that could promote best practices and by so doing, pollinate ideas.
- The work funded by this grant will be centered around improving systems to make sure that families are not left behind during emergencies and disasters, and to do so in ways that are as diverse and inclusive as the families themselves.
- In the American Rescue Plan, Congress called for NTAC to provide technical assistance through training and other tools that will help states, tribal and other organizations serving kinship families.
- The work that NTAC is about to embark on is in direct alignment with the recommendations in the report.

- NTAC will seek to elevate best practices by bringing systems together and making it possible for them to no longer remain in silos but instead, talk to each other about how best to support kin and grandparent families.
- The NTAC will be working closely with ACL and other partner organizations such as the National Caucus and Center on Black Aging, the National Indian Child Welfare Association, USAging, Zero to Three, and subject matter experts such as Dr. Crumbley, Gail Engel, and Sarah Smalls both of whom serve on this Council.

### **Looking Ahead to the Development of a National Strategy**

Mr. Greg Link, Director, Office of Supportive and Caregiver Services at ACL kicked off this discussion by providing important background information about the development of the National Family Caregiving Strategy. He gave a preview of the type of information that will be included in it, who will be involved, and the two-pronged approach for developing it. First, by the federal partners which has already commenced, followed by the piece that will be developed jointly by this Council and their colleagues on the RAISE Family Caregiving Advisory Council beginning in January 2022. This piece will focus on actions that states, community stakeholders, and private sector employers can take to support family caregivers.

He then turned the meeting over to Virginia Bell, Senior Research Analyst at Civility Management Solutions who led the Council on a facilitated discussion of the five priority goals in the report and specifically, how they should be prioritized in developing the National Strategy. Members reacted enthusiastically, were very engaged, passionate, and forthcoming with their feedback regarding which goals they felt should be at the top of the list.

### **Closing Remarks**

Greg Link and Lori Stalbaum thanked members for their work on the Council and encouraged them to stay tuned for more communication from either of them before the joint Council meeting in January. Lori adjourned the meeting.